USS Milwaukee Returns to Sea After COVID Confinement

The Freedom-variant littoral combat ship USS Milwaukee (LCS 5) steams through the ocean, Dec 16, 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Aaron Lau*

NAVAL STATION GUANTANAMO BAY – USS Milwaukee (LCS 5) a Freedom variant littoral combat ship, returned to sea Jan. 3 after being in port as a result of a portion of the crew testing positive for COVID-19, Cmdr. Katherine L Meadows, U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command and U.S. 4th Fleet Public Affairs, said in a statement.

The ship departed with all crew members, which includes the "Sea Knights" of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 22 Detachment 5 and embarked U.S. Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment.

"It is great to be heading back out to sea." said Cmdr. Brian

Forster, USS Milwaukee commanding officer. “The crew worked together as a team to ensure we are ready to conduct the mission. My entire crew is feeling great, healthy and excited for the next portion of our deployment.”

Milwaukee has been in port since Dec. 20, when it arrived for a regularly scheduled port visit.

While all Sailors onboard were 100% immunized, a portion of the crew tested positive for COVID-19. All affected Sailors exhibited mild or no symptoms.

Since being in port, Sailors were also afforded the opportunity to receive the COVID-19 booster shot. While not mandatory, the booster is recommended for Sailors.

The ship’s crew will continue to follow aggressive cleaning protocols, wear masks and social distance while at sea to ensure they remain mission ready.

Milwaukee departed its homeport of Naval Station Mayport, Florida, Dec. 14 for its regularly scheduled deployment to the U.S. 4th Fleet area of operations. Milwaukee will support the Joint Interagency Task Force South’s mission, which includes counter-illicit drug trafficking missions in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific.

UISS Conducts Successful Underwater Explosion Shock Test

The Unmanned Influence Sweep System heads out for an operational assessment in this November 2019 photo. *U.S. NAVY*

ABERDEEN, Md. – The Program Executive Office for Unmanned and Small Combatants announced on Jan. 4 the successful completion of underwater explosion shock testing on the Unmanned Influence Sweep System, a component of the Navy's suite of mine countermeasure technologies.

The test was conducted by the Aberdeen Test Center and Naval Surface Warfare Center Carderock with assistance from Textron and NSWC Panama City.

The series of shock trials is key for testing the survivability of UISS and its ability to execute its mission in hazardous environments.

Capable of being hosted from littoral combat ships, operated from shore, or vessels of opportunity, Unmanned Influence Sweep System provides acoustic and magnetic minesweeping coupled with the unmanned, semi-autonomous, diesel-powered, aluminum-hulled mine countermeasures unmanned surface vehicle, or MCM USV.

“The UISS UNDEX test demonstrates the survivability of the MCM USV,” said LCS Mission Modules Program Manager Capt. Godfrey “Gus” Weekes. “This brings us one step closer to delivering the MCM mission package to the fleet.”

The series of successful tests demonstrate the growing maturity of the UISS program. The program completed shipboard initial operational test and evaluation onboard USS Cincinnati (LCS 20) in June 2021 and Cyber initial operational test and evaluation in September 2021, ensuring the program is on schedule to achieve initial operating capability in 2022.

“Completion of these tests showcased the capability and resiliency of the MCM USV, and is a critical milestone for the program,” Weekes said. “The MCM USV is the centerpiece of the MCM mission package, and this test demonstrates the final steps we’re taking for MCM mission package IOT and E and fielding.”

In addition to minesweeping capability, the MCM USV will employ modular payloads to bring additional MCM capabilities to the fleet. The MCM USV is currently undergoing integration testing of the AQS-20C towed mine hunting sonar, which provides detection, identification, classification and localization of volume and bottom mine-like objects. The MCM USV is an integral part of the MCM mission package, which will replace the Navy’s aging Avenger-class minesweeping ships and MH-53Es Sea Dragon helicopters.

Navy Awards BAE Systems $154

M for Engineering and Technical Integration Services

MCLEAN, Va. – BAE Systems has been awarded a five-year indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity contract worth up to $154 million to continue supporting the U.S. Navy's Naval Air Warfare Center Webster Outlying Field, the company said Jan 4.

Under the contract awarded in November, BAE Systems will support the rapid integration and sustainment of command, control, communications, computers, combat systems, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems for the Special Communications Mission Systems Division.

"Those on the front lines need rapid integration of the latest technologies to ensure open, clear, secure, and reliable communications," said Lisa Hand, vice president and general manager of BAE Systems Integrated Defense Solutions. "Our C5ISR experts will provide custom solutions for military and commercial based communications platforms that will enable enhanced capabilities within the U.S. and abroad."

BAE Systems' production and technical leads provide lifecycle sustainment, front-end production and systems engineering, and installation services at the customer's Special Communication Rapid Integration Facility. They deliver high-quality, integrated components and systems for small and large craft, commercial and militarized vehicles, transit cases, radio and mobile communications, fixed base stations, command centers, and intelligence systems. The completed systems are supplied to the Navy, Special Operations Forces, the Department of Homeland Security, and other Department of Defense and non-defense agencies.

750 F-35s in Service as 2022 Begins, Lockheed Martin Says

U.S. Marines with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 and Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352, Marine Aircraft Group 11, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, conduct a new expeditionary landing demonstration with M-31 arresting gear Interim Flight Clearance (IFC), on Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., Dec. 3rd, 2020. This new capability allows the F-35C Lightning II to land on smaller runways anywhere in the world and ensures extended flexibility in combat operations. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Cpl. Cervantes, Leilani*

FORT WORTH, Texas – Lockheed Martin completed another successful year as the F-35 program continued to expand its global footprint and enhance operational capabilities, the company said Jan. 3.

In 2021, two new countries, Switzerland and Finland, selected the F-35 for their new fighter programs. Additionally, Denmark received its first F-35 and the Royal Netherlands Air Force became the eighth nation to declare their F-35 fleet ready for initial operational capability. The F-35's operational capabilities continued to advance and further demonstrated its value as the most advanced node in the 21st century battlespace. Last year alone, the F-35 successfully participated in a series of flight tests and exercises, including Project Hydra, Northern Edge, Orange Flag, Talisman Sabre and Flight Test-6.

"The F-35 joint enterprise team continues to provide unmatched combat capability to the 21st century battlespace through the F-35," said Bridget Lauderdale, vice president and general manager of the F-35 program. "Providing unparalleled support to the growing fleet, participating in numerous joint, all-domain exercises and meeting our delivery target during a global pandemic is no small feat while the F-35 was also chosen by Switzerland and Finland as their next fighter."

The F-35's operational performance remains strong. Some of the F-35A deployments and exercises demonstrated over 80% mission capable rates. As one of the most reliable aircraft in the U.S. fighter fleet, 93% of F-35 parts are performing better than predicted.

In the last year, F-35s were part of four base and ship activations and participated in more than 60 deployments and detachments, including the first U.S. Navy F-35C deployment aboard the USS Carl Vinson. During the first deployment of the Royal Navy's flagship HMS Queen Elizabeth as part of the UK's Carrier Strike Group 2021, F-35Bs from the U.S. Marine Corps and Royal Air Force flew nearly 1,300 sorties, more than 2,200 hours and conducted 44 combat missions.

These program achievements are enabled by employing digital technologies, which were vital to achieving 142 deliveries in

2021. Smart tools, connected machines and augmented realities all contribute to the delivery and sustainment of aircraft.

“Lockheed Martin is investing in digital technology that advances the F-35’s 5th Gen capabilities long after delivery,” Lauderdale added. “We’re embracing digital transformation to enable faster development and continuous deployment of software, using digital models and supercomputers to augment physical test data with simulation-based verification, and automating data processes to save time and glean insights that improve sustainment.”

With more than 750 aircraft operating from 30 bases and ships around the globe, the F-35 plays a critical role in the integrated deterrence of the U.S. and its allies. More than 1,585 pilots and 11,545 maintainers are trained and the F-35 fleet has flown nearly 470,000 cumulative flight hours. Nine nations have F-35s operating from a base on their home soil, 12 services have declared initial operational capability and six services have employed F-35s in combat.

Navy Orders Additional TH-73A Helicopters to Train Naval Aviators

A Leonardo TH-73A helicopter. *LEONARDO*

PHILADELPHIA – The newly established partnership between Leonardo and the U.S. Navy on the advanced training of next-generation helicopter pilots grew in December with the U.S. Department of Defense buying an additional 36 TH-73A rotorcraft, with initial spares, for $159.4 million, the company announced Dec. 22.

This third lot brings the total number of aircraft on order to 104 of the total requirement for 130, with delivery continuing into 2024. The fleet will be used to collectively train student pilots from the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, along several NATO allies.

In January 2020, Leonardo, through AgustaWestland Philadelphia Corp., was awarded a firm-fixed-price contract valued at $176 million for the production and delivery of an initial 32 TH-73A helicopters. The agreement – which included an initial package of spares, support, dedicated equipment, and specific pilot and maintenance training services – was confirmed that following November through the order of a second lot of aircraft through a $171 million contract modification for an additional 36 helicopters.

All TH-73As will be fully produced at the Leonardo's plant in Philadelphia where the AW119 is exclusively built on an FAA Certified Part 21 production line. The site operates today as a supplier and partner to the U.S. DoD through the TH-73A program for the U.S. Navy, of which Leonardo is prime contractor, in addition to the Boeing MH-139A program for the U.S. Air Force.

Located in Philadelphia since the early 1980s, the plant today employs 700 of Leonardo's 7,000 employees active in the U.S. and has become a Divisional Center of Excellence for production, support, engineering and training activities. The Philadelphia site includes production of the AW119, AW139 and the AW609 tilt-rotor, as well as support, maintenance and repair services. Pilot and maintenance technician training is performed at the training academy, co-located at the same campus as all other U.S. functions, which was inaugurated earlier this year as part of an $80 million dollar expansion.

A delivery ceremony for the first TH-73A to the U.S. Navy took place in June 2021 in Philadelphia. Based on the IFR instrument flight rules variant of the commercial model AW119Kx, the TH-73A, which will replace the TH-57B/C Sea Ranger first introduced in 1968, is perfectly suited for both initial and advanced training.

Equipped with a powerful and reliable Pratt & Whitney PT-6 engine and characterized by dual safety and hydraulic systems and advanced digital avionics by Genesys Aerosystems, the TH-73 can perform every phase of the U.S. Navy's training program without compromise. The new system will allow the U.S. Navy to upgrade its technologies from analogue to digital and is expected to be in service until after 2050.

The fleet will be based at Naval Air Station Whiting Field in Milton, Florida. After being awarded the initial contract and in order to support the fleet once operational, Leonardo announced plans to build a 100,000 square foot support center

immediately adjacent to NAS Whiting Field in partnership with the City of Milton, Santa Rosa County and Space Florida. Site work has already begun and the facility's completion is expected by the end of 2023.

U.S. Navy Ships Interdict Heroin Worth $4 Million in Arabian Sea

Two U.S. Navy ships seized 385 kilograms of heroin worth approximately $4 million from a stateless fishing vessel transiting the Arabian Sea, Dec. 27. *U.S. NAVY*

MANAMA, Bahrain – Two U.S. Navy ships seized 385 kilograms of heroin worth approximately $4 million from a stateless fishing vessel transiting the Arabian Sea, Dec. 27, Naval Forces

Central Command said Dec. 30.

U.S. Coast Guard personnel embarked aboard USS Tempest (PC 2) and USS Typhoon (PC 5) discovered the illegal shipment while conducting a flag verification boarding in accordance with customary international law. The confiscated drugs were destroyed at sea by U.S. forces.

The coastal patrol ships were operating as part of an international task force called Combined Task Force 150, which has increased regional patrols to locate and disrupt unlawful maritime activity. CTF 150 is one of three task forces under Combined Maritime Forces.

“This latest seizure is a demonstration that CTF 150 and assigned surface and air assets are ready to conduct interdiction operations 365 days a year,” said Royal New Zealand Navy Capt. Brendon Clark, commander of CTF 150.

In 2021, CTF 150 has seized illegal drugs worth more than $193 million (at regional wholesale prices) during counter-narcotics operations at sea. This is a higher total value than the amount of drugs the task force interdicted in the previous four years combined.

“This interdiction highlights the incredible work of our ships and Sailors and serves as a reminder of the value in having forward-deployed naval forces on scene and ready,” said Lt. Cmdr. Jordan Bradford, Typhoon’s commanding officer, who is from Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

International naval forces operating in support CTF 150 regularly conduct maritime security and counter-terrorism operations at sea outside the Arabian Gulf to disrupt criminal and terrorist organizations and their related illicit activities, including the movement of personnel, weapons, narcotics and charcoal. These efforts help ensure legitimate commercial shipping transits the region free from non-state threats.

“We were able to execute this interdiction safely and with precision due to the tireless efforts of all involved,” said Lt. Cmdr. Matt Intoccia, a native of Collegeville, Pennsylvania, and the commanding officer of Tempest. “I am proud of our collective contribution to regional stability and look forward to more opportunities for operational success.”

The U.S. Navy released the stateless fishing vessel and its nine crew members, who identified themselves as Iranian nationals, after seizing the drugs.

Combined Maritime Forces is the largest multinational naval partnership in the world. The organization includes 34 nations and is headquartered in Bahrain with U.S. Naval Forces Central Command and U.S. 5th Fleet.

Navy Orders 65 Production BQM-177A Aerial Target Drones from Kratos

The Navy's newest subsonic aerial target, BQM-177A, conducts a training test flight from USS Barry (DDG-52) Sept. 9, 2021, off the coast of Japan. *U.S. NAVY*

SAN DIEGO – Kratos Defense & Security Solutions Inc. announced Dec. 28 that its division Kratos Unmanned Aerial Systems has been awarded a $50.1 million contract modification to a previously awarded firm-fixed-price contract to exercise an option to procure 65 BQM-177A Subsonic Aerial Targets.

The order includes 50 for the Navy, seven for Japan and eight for Saudi Arabia, as well as associated technical and administrative data in support of full rate production lot three. The Naval Air Systems Command, Patuxent River, Maryland, is the contracting activity.

"The Kratos team is incredibly proud to receive this third consecutive full-rate production option award supporting our U.S. Navy customer," said Steve Fendley, president of Kratos Unmanned Systems Division. "We are also excited that 15 of these drone aircraft will support the U.S. government's foreign allies. Throughout the challenges of the last two years, Kratos has remained focused on developing, producing, and delivering target and tactical drone systems to support the established and forecasted customer needs."

U.S. Navy Seizes 1,400 Assault Rifles During Illicit Weapons Interdiction

Illicit weapons seized from a stateless fishing vessel in the North Arabian Sea are arranged for inventory aboard guided-missile destroyer USS O'Kane's (DDG 77) flight deck, Dec. 21. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Elisha Smith*

MANAMA, Bahrain – U.S. 5th Fleet ships seized approximately 1,400 AK-47 assault rifles and 226,600 rounds of ammunition from a stateless fishing vessel during a flag verification boarding in accordance with customary international law in the North Arabian Sea, Dec. 20, NAVCENT public affairs said Dec. 22.

U.S. Navy patrol coastal ships USS Tempest (PC 2) and USS

Typhoon (PC 5) found the weapons during a search conducted by embarked U.S. Coast Guard personnel. The illicit weapons and ammunition were later transported to guided-missile destroyer USS O'Kane (DDG 77) where they await final disposition.

The stateless vessel was assessed to have originated in Iran and transited international waters along a route historically used to traffic weapons unlawfully to the Houthis in Yemen. The direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer of weapons to the Houthis violates U.N. Security Council Resolutions and U.S. sanctions.

The vessel's five crew members identified themselves as Yemeni nationals and will be returned to Yemen.

After removing the crew and illicit cargo, U.S. naval forces determined the stateless vessel was a hazard to navigation for commercial shipping and sank it.

U.S. naval forces regularly perform maritime security operations in the Middle East to ensure the free flow of legitimate trade and to disrupt the transport of illicit cargo that often funds terrorism and other unlawful activity. U.S. Navy warships operating in the U.S. 5th Fleet region have seized approximately 8,700 illicit weapons in 2021.

Guided-missile cruiser USS Monterey (CG 61) seized dozens of advanced Russian-made anti-tank guided missiles, thousands of Chinese Type 56 assault rifles, and hundreds of PKM machine guns, sniper rifles and rocket-propelled grenade launchers from a stateless vessel transiting the North Arabian Sea in May.

In February, guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81) seized a cache of weapons off the coast of Somalia, including thousands of AK-47 assault rifles, light machine guns, heavy sniper rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers and crew served weapons. The inventory also included barrels, stocks, optical scopes and weapon systems.

The U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations encompasses approximately 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea, parts of the Indian Ocean and three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, Suez Canal and Strait of Bab al Mandeb.

Advanced Weapons Elevators Completed Aboard USS Gerald R. Ford

The aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) departed Naval Station Norfolk to make the transit to Newport News Shipyard in support of its planned incremental availability, a

six-month period of modernization, maintenance, and repairs, Aug. 20. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Ryan Seelbach*

WASHINGTON – On Dec. 22, the 11th and final advanced weapons elevator aboard USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) was turned over to the ship's crew, according to Program Executive Office Aircraft Carriers public affairs.

AWEs on this first-of-class aircraft carrier operate using several advanced technologies, including electromagnetic motors instead of more labor intensive, hydraulic systems. The advanced technology enables fewer sailors to safely move ordnance from weapons magazines to the flight deck with unparalleled speed and agility.

"This is a significant milestone for the Navy, ship, and her crew," said Rear Adm. James P. Downey, Program Executive Officer for Aircraft Carriers. "With completion of this final AWE, we now have the entire system to operate and train with."

Downey added the Navy-industry AWE team worked tirelessly in port and at sea to complete the elevators to ensure the availability of needed materials and engineering expertise. Multiple vendors have collaborated along the way to ensure seamless support to multi-shift, shipboard production efforts.

"The Navy-industry teaming provided the opportunities for hundreds of craftsmen, technicians and engineers, working around the clock – through multiple underway and holiday periods – to get these advanced systems on line and operational," said Downey.

The team logged the milestone in the midst of the ship's six-month planned incremental availability at Huntington Ingalls Industries-Newport News Shipbuilding facility in Hampton Roads, Virginia. Gerald R. Ford is scheduled to complete the PIA this spring, followed by training and deployment.

"The end game is always operational readiness," added Downey,

“and Ford is on track to complete this PIA on schedule, conduct sea trials, and to move on to follow-on tasking.”

Austal Delivers Future USS Canberra to U.S. Navy

The future USS Canberra (LCS 3). *AUSTAL USA*

MOBILE, Ala. – The U.S. Navy took delivery of the future USS Canberra (LCS 30) at Austal USA on Dec. 21, the company announced, the second Independence-variant littoral combat ship Austal delivered to the Navy in 2021.

“With two ship launches, two christenings, and now the successful completion of sea trials and delivery for LCS 30, it has been a busy last couple of months at Austal USA,” said Austal USA President Rusty Murdaugh. “All of these milestones

require extensive coordination between Austal, our vendors and our Navy teammates and I’m proud to say that these partnerships grow stronger with each milestone achievement.”

Acceptance Trials for LCS 30 were completed in early November, demonstrating to the Navy the successful operation of the ship’s major systems and equipment. Delivery documents were signed onboard the future USS Canberra and the crew will now begin preparing the ship for her commissioning into the fleet.

Four LCSs are currently under construction by the company, including the future USS Santa Barbara (LCS 32). Final assembly is underway on the future USS Augusta (LCS 34) and modules are under construction on the future USS Kingsville (LCS 36) and the future USS Pierre (LCS 38).

Two Expeditionary Fast Transports are also under construction at the shipyard, with a third under contract. In October, Austal USA was awarded a contract for the detailed design and construction of two U.S. Navy Towing, Salvage, and Rescue Ships (T-ATS), the first contract for Austal’s new steel construction facility.

Austal has recently been awarded several post-delivery service-related contracts for the LCS program including sustainment execution contracts for both variants of LCS on the East and West coasts and an indefinite delivery indefinite quantity contract to support LCS deployed to the western Pacific and Indian Ocean.